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A ATUAÇÃO DE PSICÓLOGOS ESCOLARES DIANTE DA PANDEMIA DO COVID-19: UM ESTUDO INTERCULTURAL ENTRE BRASIL E ESTADOS UNIDOS

SÃO CARLOS - SP

2022

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Instituição sede do projeto: UFSCar – Universidade Federal de São Carlos

Número do processo FAPESP: 2020/13555-4

Vigência do projeto: 01/03/2021 a 30/04/2022

SÃO CARLOS - SP

2022

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Did the Pandemic Impact Differently the Work of School Psychologists in Private and Public Schools? A Qualitative Study from Brazil

Abstract

This study aimed to identify and analyze the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the work context of school psychologists in the public and private educational system in Brazil, emphasizing the specificities of each context. Participants were fourteen school psychologists working in both public and private schools, located in São Paulo state, Brazil. For data collection, a semi-structured interview script was used and the results were analyzed qualitatively using Thematic Analyses. Four key themes were identified: i) compared to their public-school counterparts, school psychologists in private schools had more material and technological resources. Similarly, the families had unequal access to technological resources, with students from private schools experiencing greater access to classes and to the team of psychology professionals during school closures. These inequities are explained, above all, ii) by the conditions of social vulnerability of the families that access the public school system. iii) Students with disabilities who attend public schools were even more affected, since the psychology professionals who work in this context pointed out the significant challenges of offering services. Finally, iv) differences in the target audience of interventions were revealed, since public-school professionals mostly provided indirect services to other school professionals, especially teachers.

Keywords: psychologists; school psychologists; pandemic; public school; private school; qualitative study.

Introduction

In early 2020, an outbreak of a new coronavirus, known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome - Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV2), was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Ghinai et al., 2020). Infection with SARS-CoV2 produced a disease that became popularly known as Coronavirus 2019 disease (COVID-19). The outbreak began in late 2019 in Wuhan, China, and in the following weeks, the number of people infected with the new virus grew rapidly throughout the country. Within a few months, the disease spread to several countries around the world, extrapolating the Asian and European context (Ghinai et al., 2020).

According to international epidemiological data, published daily by the WHO (2022), Brazil was one of the countries most affected by the pandemic, registering high numbers of cases and deaths from COVID-19. In the country, whose healthcare system was already facing serious structural problems (Santos et al., 2021), the number of infected people was 30,012,798 and there were 660,312 deaths by April 2022 (World Health Organization, 2022). The denialism and controversial role of Brazil's political leaders has caught the attention of the international scientific community (Mackenzie, 2020) and the psychosocial effects on the population in the short and long term remain underexplored.

A pandemic, considered a catastrophic event with severe consequences for society (De Castilho Sá et al., 2020; Ventura et al., 2021; Littleton, & Stanford, 2021), can trigger psychological reactions and impact people's mental health and interpersonal relationships (Steffens, 2018). Pandemics can compromise people's psychological system and behavior, alter their life routine, and commonly trigger conditions such as post-traumatic stress, depression, panic syndrome, burnout, hypertension, diabetes, urticaria, gastritis, cerebrovascular diseases, among others (Rocha et al., 2016). It can be said that children,

youth, and their families are at risk not only because they are exposed to the virus, but also because they experience levels of stress, anxiety, and tension in the face of the catastrophe they are experiencing (Imran et al., 2020).

Children and adolescents' reactions to pandemics depend on several factors, including how they coped with everyday challenges before the disaster, the severity of the disaster and how it affected their lives, whether they lost loved ones or if they were separated from their parents or other caregivers, and the type of social support they have after the disaster to cope with the adversities (Masten, & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020). Understanding the situations that produced the pandemic, expanding their social support and strengthening family and community bonds are strategies capable of favoring the resilience processes of children (Jiao et al., 2020), because they can imply the construction of social and psychological resources that can help them to cope with the adversities arising from the pandemic.

Educational systems that work directly with students and their families, especially those with school psychologists, can play a critical role in developing the resources, skills, and relationships that contribute to the population in coping with the adverse effects of COVID-19 (Masten, & Motti-Sttefanidi, 2020). These professionals are of utmost importance, as they can offer resources and care to students, families, and teachers, who have experienced, in a unique way, the challenges imposed by the pandemic.

Schaffer et al. (2021) conducted a study that aimed to analyze how the service of school psychologists in the United States has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic. The research participants involved 675 school psychologists, nationwide, who completed a questionnaire to obtain demographic information and compare the perceptions of school psychologists before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in the areas of (a) roles and responsibilities; (b) service delivery; (c) perceived concerns and barriers to service

delivery; and (d) concerns and recommendations about school resumption plans. The results showed that these professionals perceived a very significant impact on students' mental health, in addition to difficulty in accessing families who performed psychological follow-ups as a consequence of social distancing. The participants also reported that they had to make interventions with the school staff related to the mental health of the professionals, something that they did not do frequently before the pandemic. Moreover, they reported concerns about their interventions in the resumption of activities (post-pandemic world), because they recognized that students and teachers will need more mental health support when they return to schools.

In the same direction, Ritchie et al. (2021) conducted a study using an online questionnaire with 214 Canadian school psychologists to investigate the practice of these professionals during school closures. Most respondents indicated a decrease in providing interventions with students compared to the pre-pandemic period. This finding, according to the authors, was not associated with a lack of recognition of the importance of school psychologists' work during the pandemic. On the contrary, the research concluded that the fact that fewer students received mental health evaluations and interventions during the pandemic will imply in an increase in the demand for psychological services offered in schools after the resumption of normal school activities.

Thus, there is an international movement to identify and evaluate the role of school psychologists in the pandemic and its effects on students' lives (Hasking et al., 2021; Ritchie et al., 2021; Schaffer et al., 2021). Complementarily, the specialized literature has suggested that the actions and interventions of school psychologists consider the various systems in which students are inserted, with emphasis on the family and community (Hasking et al., 2021). However, research in the Brazilian context on the reality of school psychologists in the context of the pandemic is scarce, which indicates the need the need

to better understand the experiences of psychology professionals who work in these contexts.

Given the current calamitous situation and need for social isolation, the school context in Brazil has suffered significant changes. The schools, by federal and state legislative decrees, were closed indefinitely on March 13, 2020, which required that the teaching activities and assistance to students and families take place remotely. It is worth pointing out, however, that the educational institutions in the country are structured differently depending on whether they are public or private. The public system, attended by the largest contingent of Brazilian students, is coordinated by Public Education Departments. These departments work on the management of the educational institutions according to the political plans in force, from the supervision and administration of the schools and the maintenance of financial resources (Barbosa et al., 2022). In addition, these institutions have professionals from other areas, such as social workers and psychologists, who are responsible for specialized interventions, evaluate the mental health of students and the condition of social vulnerability of families, and refer cases to other intersectoral services, such as health or justice system (Barbosa et al., 2022).

The Brazilian private school system is geographically spread throughout the country due to issues of social inequality and the unequal investment in the public and private education sectors (Adrião, 2018). The high investment that middle- and upper-class families employ in private educational institutions encourage their expansion, which implies the process of privatization of the educational system to the detriment of the public system (Adrião, 2018), as well as the consolidation of abysmal inequalities. Therefore, it is important to highlight that education in Brazil, and consequently the performance of school psychologists, is unequal, and families accessing the public education are also more exposed to indicators of social vulnerability. On the other hand,

private school students and their families have more material and symbolic resources, which can be decisive in crisis situations, such as those faced during the pandemic period (Werle, & da Silva, 2021).

The performance of Brazilian psychologists in the public education system is supported by Law No. 13.935/19 (Brazil, 2019), which ensures that the Education Departments delivery psychological services within their teams to work with students, families, and school teams, promoting specialized interventions and referrals to other services, when necessary. However, what is observed is that school psychologists are difficult to access in public schools due to infrastructure problems (Nunes et al., 2019), which are generally responsible for all schools in the municipality. In contrast, private schools generally have the support of one psychologist per school, although the aforementioned Law does not apply in this system. Thus, professionals in the public school system were already facing structural problems even before the pandemic, especially in terms of working conditions and the number of students they were assisting. Therefore, the inequalities detected in the quality of education in the public and private network are accentuated, as students from the public-school network have more limited assistance in the area of school psychology.

From this contextualization, this study is based on the following assumptions: i) the pandemic is not a 'democratic' event, in the sense of affecting people and institutions in similar proportions; ii) people experiencing conditions of social vulnerability in the pre-pandemic period had their living conditions worsened and new challenges were imposed; iii) access to services, including education, was unequal, with sociodemographic variables, such as ethnicity, social class and gender, being determinant conditions for the perpetuation of abysmal differences; iv) professionals working in public and private education systems, including psychologists, were also affected in very

different ways. Despite this, after a non-systematic literature review, no research and publications were located in the Brazilian context on how the pandemic altered the working conditions of psychology professionals working in different education systems, namely public and private.

Given the above-mentioned differences, it was expected that the experiences of psychology professionals during the pandemic are distinct, especially because the social and historical conditions enable ruptures and changes in daily life in very particular ways. Thus, this study aimed to identify and analyze the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the work context of school psychologists in the public and private educational system in Brazil, emphasizing the specificities of each context.

Method

Participants and Institutions

The recruited participants were fourteen school psychologists working in both public and private schools, located in medium or small sized cities from São Paulo state, Brazil. The sample consisted of twelve women and two men, aged between 28 and 66 years. Participants were chosen by convenience and non-probabilistic sampling. Principals of private schools or Public Education Departments gave written permission for eligible school psychologists in their schools to participate in the research. Following such permission, participants were recruited by means of email or telephone invitations. The selection criteria for the participants included psychologists who were already working in schools before the pandemic, and who continued to work in the same environment at the time of the interview.

Data Collection and Procedures

The research followed the ethical human research procedures as defined by the Brazilian National Health Council (BNHC), in its Resolution 510/2016. A Research Ethics Committee approved the research project duly registered with the BNHC (Protocol Number 39848120.5.0000.5504) and participants provided informed consent through an online form sent before the interviews took place. Participants indicated they understood that their participation was voluntary and that their privacy and confidentiality would be preserved. The researcher responsible for conducting the interviews also informed the participants that, if necessary due to discomfort after sharing emotional themes, she would refer them to a specialized psychological service.

For data collection, a semi-structured interview script was used. The interview script was adapted from one developed by Perry (2022). According to Minayo (1994), the interview favors obtaining information through individual speech, which reveals structural conditions, value systems, norms and symbols and transmits, through a spokesperson, representations of certain groups. The semi-structured interview allows the research participant the opportunity to talk about their experiences, based on the main focus proposed by the researcher, while allowing free and spontaneous answers from the participant (Triviños, 1987).

The interview guide (Perry, 2022) included questions about: i) the work context and the function performed by the psychology professionals; ii) their role and function before the COVID-19 interruptions; iii) how they adjusted to the changes and the work strategies that have been developed; iv) the impact that the pandemic had on the institution, on the students and the on employees; and v) their perspectives regarding their current functions and thoughts about how their role may look in the post-pandemic period. Even though there was a script, as these were semi-structured interviews, the interviewer

asked follow-up questions to ensure a better and deepening understanding of the issues addressed by the participants.

The interviews were conducted remotely via the online meeting platform Google Meet. The duration of the interviews varied from participant to participant, ranging from 30 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes on average. All interviews were recorded, with the consent of the participants, and transcribed in full by the first author.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Thematic Analysis (TA) (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun, & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012) was conducted on the collected data. Thematic Analysis is a way of producing extensive and detailed descriptions – as occurs in interviews – of emergent themes through a process of coding and systematizing data (Liebenberg et al., 2020). This data analysis strategy included a few steps: i) familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, which are most often presented in the database; ii) the identification of themes in which the codes could be categorized; iii) the analysis of these categories to understand and explain the meaning and dynamics of the themes addressed, maintaining rigor through the prior categorization of the codes (Liebenberg et al., 2020).

To ensure the trustworthiness of such an analysis, we used methodological rigor to guarantee the quality of the study. Thus, the study relied on independent verification of the data, that is, the interviews were analyzed by the authors separately and any discrepancies were eliminated by consensus, in the presence of an external researcher with expertise in the research field.

Results

As already explained, this study aimed to identify and analyze the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work context of psychology professionals who work in the public and private education system, emphasizing the specificities of each context. The participants' comments revealed that their work was not affected equally, since the working conditions and the institutional reality had a drastic impact on the effects of the pandemic and the ability to respond to the catastrophe.

Four key themes were identified that revealed the main differences between psychologists working in public schools and private schools. Notably, i) the professionals who work in private schools had more material and technological resources, which allowed them access to equipment that made remote work and the necessary adaptations possible. Similarly, the families had unequal access to technological resources, with students from private schools experiencing greater access to classes and to the team of psychology professionals during school closures. These inequities are explained, above all, ii) by the conditions of social vulnerability of the families that access the public school system, further worsening the living conditions of the students and their families. iii) students with disabilities who attend public schools were even more affected, since the psychology professionals who work in this context pointed out the significant challenges of offering services or helping in the adaptation of teaching materials for remote learning. Finally, iv) differences in the target audience of interventions were revealed, since public-school professionals mostly provided indirect services to other school professionals, especially teachers.

Availability and Absence of Resources

As demonstrated in Table 1, the professionals working in private institutions demonstrated more favorable conditions to continue services during the pandemic because they had resources (both in the institution and the students' families) that enabled the maintenance of pedagogical and psycho-educational services. By having internet and technological equipment, the families of private school students were able to maintain connections and monitor the academic activities of students, including services offered and conducted by psychology professionals. Some professionals reported that the private schools were quickly able to adapt to remote teaching. In some cases, professionals mentioned that they already had online educational platforms that enhanced the remote teaching implemented in the pandemic. In contrast, the professionals working in the public education network reported limited access to technological resources in their own work environment. They also cited difficult access to families who also did not have the technological devices to be able to maintain contact with the school and, consequently, with the psychology professional.

The differences were also highlighted in relation to the work context itself, as the professionals linked to private institutions reported having the necessary equipment to work with students and their families (computers, tablets, internet, for example). On the other hand, the professionals who work in the public network reported that these resources are deficient, causing the bonds between them and the families to be weakened during the period of social isolation and closure of the institutions. For example, a frequent activity of school psychologists from the public education system during the pandemic was to frequently try to contact families by phone to make them aware of the importance of keeping in touch with the school and staff.

Table 1. Availability and Absence of Resources

Working Context	Participants' quotes
Private Schools	*We have not had a time when the school was closed down completely, or a time when students were left without lessons or support. Right when the pandemic happened here, we already adapted to online teaching. In the first week we already started with the online format [...] so we were able, in that very week, to organize ourselves to start teaching online.* **Participant 1.** *The team was already moving, so the school didn't have a closure period, they already adapted quickly to the online platform and started thinking about remote teaching.* **Participant 2.** *[...]we gave the students the early vacation at this time so that we, as a team, could make the necessary adjustments for the remote teaching that would be implemented right after the end of the early vacation. This involved the purchase of apparatus needed for remote work, and a new orientation on what the process would look like. Since 2020, all of my activities-skills projects, parent school, orientations, and intakes-have been turned into video calls.* **Participant 4.** *The school was closed for a while until everything was adapted for remote teaching. But this lasted very little time [...] because it is a private school, which ends up acting independently from the municipality.* **Participant 5.** *We made the transition quickly, because even before the pandemic, the school was already working with online platforms for sending materials to students and training for teachers. [...] Throughout 2020, the school operated remotely, but in September, when there was the possibility of a return to face-to-face teaching, the school returned with 35% of the number of students and with the professionals working in rotation.* **Participant 9.**
Public Schools	*The schools in the municipality are all working through remote learning these days. Children who have internet at home access the virtual teaching platform and children who don't have access receive the printed material at home.* **Participant 6.** *Due to the pandemic, many professionals were losing loved ones and this change to remote teaching and all the necessary adaptation involved by the teachers generated a lot of suffering to these groups, because many didn't even have the technological means to do the work remotely, which caused a lot of anguish and anxiety in these professionals.* **Participant 7.** *And, even in the Secretariat of Education, our equipment, and the internet available are precarious, so in order to continue this work remotely, I think all the professionals had to use their own resources, the ones they had.* **Participant 7.** *We had a lot of exhaustion, because we didn't know how to proceed, even more because we didn't have all the infrastructure we needed, which we still don't have today.* **Participant 8.** *[...]we have some parents, some families, who have difficulties accessing the Internet. So, the online classes are for those who opt for that. It is obligatory for those who have this possibility, otherwise, it's just these printed activities. So, there are children who are not taking classes right now - those who have more difficulty accessing the internet.* **Participant 10.**

Table 1. Participants' quotes, taken from the original transcripts of the interviews, concerning the theme of Availability and Absence of Resources.

Intensification of Vulnerabilities and New Demands on Professionals

The psychology professionals working in private educational institutions demonstrated a change in their work demands in relation to the new conditions of remote learning that the students were facing. For example, in the context of the pandemic they provided more services related to students' mental health condition, family conflicts and reducing barriers or challenges with remote learning.

On the other hand, the professionals who work in the public network demonstrated that the changes in the demands focused mainly on the families' conditions of social vulnerability, which intensified during the pandemic period. The lack of material resources, hunger, and domestic violence were mentioned several times by these participants and made evident that the professionals in the public system turned their attention more to the basic needs and confronting the situations of violence experienced by the families, than to pedagogical issues or psycho-educational interventions that could be implemented to potentiate the students' learning.

Table 2. Intensification of Vulnerabilities and New Demands on Professionals

Working Context	Participants' quotes
	In 2019, [my work had] a focus, in 2020 [my work has] another focus, very directed to the issue of mental health, not only of the students' own demands, but also our concern as a team, because we believe in the school that mental health is the pillar that supports all the other demands that may arise. (...) So the focus from 2020 was very directed to mental health, ensuring that they were well with their health within this new context **Participant 1**.
	For example, before the pandemic, we used to hear this complaint of exhaustion from students in the mid-November, at the end of the year. Today, they have been presenting this complaint much earlier, in March for example, as I told you. So, the demand has changed a lot. In the pre-pandemic, they were more focused on living together, pedagogical and school issues. And today they are mostly focused on pandemic issues and socio-emotional issues. **Participant 4.**
Private Schools	*I think people today are more concerned about mental health. A few days ago, I was talking to a student, and he told me: "I am worried about my mental health". And to hear a 14-year-old teenager saying this made me very happy, because I saw that the work, we are trying to do to make them realize that they have this need to take care of their mental health is also having effects. So, I think that the biggest concern of parents today is in relation to emotional well-being. Learning, too, but those who come to me have prioritized the issue of emotional health. The students that come to me also have the same mental health concerns, because they are feeling bad, sad, and have had relationship difficulties. So, they come to me more because they had anxiety crises, depressive crises, which did not happen so often before the pandemic.* **Participant 9.**
	I noticed more anguish from the children, not so much from them, but coming from the parents. There were parents that in the parent meetings, we saw that it would be very difficult: "But my daughter doesn't want to attend class, so I won't keep her in school". [...] Because the parent complained that the child was unmotivated, that the child had no friends, that nobody interacted with the child. So, this also we think made it very difficult. **Participant 14.**
	[...] also, the poverty barrier in the sense of mothers reporting to me that they don't want to participate in video calls because they live in a dirty, poor house and don't want people to see that in the video. **Participant 3.**
	[...] due to the pandemic, many families lost their source of income because of the many dismissals that happened during this period. The school is not a social assistance service, but, as the families are inserted in the school, they have been seeking this kind of support in this institution as well. [...] The schools are not being able to approach and maintain the link with these families in the same way as before and, consequently, we psychologists also end up apart, especially in cases of violence. We don't know the progress of the cases because the school is a protective factor [...] and the cases of violence stopped appearing at this time, which makes us wonder: have these cases really stopped or are they just not being able to be identified? **Participant 7.**
Public Schools	*So, what I did the most, and I still do today, with the closing of the schools, was to conduct active searches for children who are not accessing the school materials remotely. When there were some cases of violence, I also did some remote consultations, but this was basically my work during the whole year of 2020 [...] And in poverty it is even worse because the families can't afford to have a cell phone or to pick up the homework from school, because the school opens from 8am to 1pm, and the parents can't go there at this time because of their work. So, I think this is almost a cultural issue: the devaluation of education.* **Participant 8.**
	[...] school is a place of child protection. It is not only pedagogical, but also the matters of food, of care. So, all this vulnerability, these material losses, of people, of jobs, were changing. The community started to have other needs. **Participant 10.**

The perspective [of work] is also amplified[...] There were also contacts made by women (who are the ones that call the service the most) reporting situations of domestic violence, so school psychology leaves its own field and enters something else that is damaging the lives of these families, which is the violence intensified by the pandemic, or unemployment, or separation, or even suicidal ideation. So, all these demands appeared at the same time. **Participant 11.**

Another thing: children who were around drug abuse, licit or illicit, this increased a lot. The level of consumption increased during the pandemic. So, we also investigate how this issue is for the child; the issue of violence, there, or the lack of control [...] We don't have the possibility to talk to this child to see how he or she is impacted by all this, but it is possible to understand some things through this listening. **Participant 12.**

The needs have changed completely. There are many children that don't have enough to eat. There are schools that are doing this: the father comes, gives the homework, and takes the food basket home. We are talking about hunger, about children who are starving. And we are delivering basic food baskets, the fourth or fifth time since the beginning of the pandemic. Besides school supplies, which were also provided to these children. So, there are children who have basic needs that we knew were in a difficult situation, but now they are in misery. The basic food basket that comes from the school feeds them and the entire household of sometimes 20 people. So of course, we know that the needs have changed, especially in the material aspect. **Participant 12.**

Table 2. Participants' quotes, taken from the original transcripts of the interviews, concerning the theme of Intensification of Vulnerabilities and New Demands on Professionals.

Inequalities in the Attendance of Students with Disabilities

The professionals from both contexts, both public and private schools, highlighted their actions and concern with students with disabilities during the pandemic period. However, the psychologists who work in private schools kept, even after the pandemic, their attributions focused on the adaptation of materials and pedagogical resources for students with disabilities. Some even reported that they had the opportunity to work only with this population in individualized consultations, which allowed the students to be included in the remote classes and to perform the activities satisfactorily.

The professionals from public schools, on the other hand, pointed out that their actions with students with disabilities suffered considerable disruptions. They mentioned the families' difficulties in helping them conduct the activities and the work overload that made it impossible for them to follow up more directly with the students with disabilities. It was evidenced, once again, how the pandemic impacted differently the actions taken by psychology professionals, with the students and professionals from public schools more vehemently affected.

Table 3. Inequalities in the Attendance of Students with Disabilities

Working Context	Participants' quotes
Private Schools	*The project we have related to the inclusion issue was also continued* [during the pandemic]. *In this project, individual follow-ups are given, and materials are prepared for students with atypical development, in addition to interventions in classrooms, if necessary.* **Participant 1.**
	I was, in the face of this, more with the function of curriculum adaptations for children with disabilities for the online format. This was a very big demand, because some students did not follow the online classes, the parents could not support them, so it was a joint work with the teaching team and with the special education support team that we are forming now. **Participant 2.**
	Since the boy I was accompanying with ASD [Autistic Spectrum Disorder] *couldn't participate in the online activities, we sent the activities home. And I did these activities. I had to make all the adaptations for the activities he was receiving at home.* **Participant 5.**
	The teachers, I think the demand is more focused on emotional difficulties, but mostly on academic ones. So, mainly about how to hold the attention of students with ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder] *in an online class, for example. In that sense, they would come to me for guidance on how to ensure that learning is more effective.* **Participant 9.**
Public Schools	*But remembering that these services are performed according to the school triad: the student* [with disability], *the family, and the teacher, the school team. Before the pandemic, I worked mostly in this triad. Today, it is no longer in locus. Today, many times, I rely on third-party information to complete these assistances and collect this information regarding the students.* **Participant 3.**
	I, for example, suffer a lot, because a child [with disabilities] *who is giving trouble in a school, I am called; parents who are not obeying the rules, I am also called; a child who has a specific problem, I am also called. So, I get very overwhelmed.* **Participant 3.**
	[...] a while ago I went to visit a student with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. It was a specific situation, in which I had to go to his house. The mother doesn't have Internet at home. So, she goes to the school to find activities for her student to do. I went to look at the activities with her, and she was doing them instead of the student. So, it is beautiful, but it is painful because she wants to help her son. And she is not a teacher. So, since he didn't want to do it, he wasn't available, she was doing it. And I am going to say that this is wrong? It is not wrong, within this context of her life, of her experience. It was her way of dealing with the situation. So, it is very diverse. And I believe that the less resources, the less schooling people have, in its simplicity, the less the academic quality is lost, more and more at this time. **Participant 11.**

Table 3. Participants' quotes, taken from the original transcripts of the interviews, concerning the theme of Inequalities in the Attendance of Students with Disabilities.

Target Audience of the Interventions in the School Context

Differences were found between the two groups regarding the type of care and target audience of the interventions carried out in schools by psychology professionals during the pandemic. As already highlighted in Theme 1, the professionals who worked in private schools focused their work activities on individual care of students and on the demands of families, particularly in topics involving mental health issues, family conflicts, and the lack of adherence of students to remote education. There was no emphasis on interventions with education professionals (employees, teachers, and managers, for example). On the contrary, this group revealed that the pandemic caused a distancing of school psychologists to the professionals from other areas (such as teachers and principals).

The professionals who work in the public network revealed that the proposed interventions focused on the education professionals, particularly teachers. They reported that the necessary adaptations to the remote teaching had repercussions on the increase of teachers' workload and stress levels, which required psychologists to intensify the services for this group. They also reported that they were responsible for several continuing education activities, including topics such as self-care, intrafamily violence, and skills needed to use technological tools.

Table 4. Target Audience of the Interventions in the School Context

Working Context	Participants' quotes
Private Schools	*The contact I have with the team of teachers happens on demand. They identify that there is a problem with a student and, thus, we work with the family and with the students themselves for welcoming, orientations and referrals. Today, unfortunately, I can't do a specific psychological work for the professionals, because I already have to deal with the demands of the entire school's students being just one psychologist. The contact that I have with the teachers is more focused on finding out about the students themselves.* **Participant 4.** *[...] I have no contact with the administrative and pedagogical coordination, with or without pandemic, because they do not understand very well what I do in there. Whatever I do, for them, is fine. I " containing" this child inside the classroom, for them everything is fine.* **Participant 5.** *It was more difficult, especially in the beginning, because, as it was a process that required a lot of adaptation to their work, it was very difficult for me to get in touch with them* [the teachers], *because of the overloaded work they were going through. [...]But the coordinators were also very overwhelmed with work at that moment, so, even with them the contact was difficult. Most of the time, the contact happened through messages talking about some demand to assist families and students, because they identified some problem, but it was all very shallow – there was no time to have a meeting, a more complete planning.* **Participant 9.** *I had more regular meetings with the teachers* [before the pandemic]. *They were usually weekly because, for them, the technological issue scared them a little.* **Participant 14.**
Public Schools	*At least once a week we meet in a video call. Teachers, the coordination, the direction, the technicians [...] the technical team also has a separate WhatsApp group, where we exchange some ideas.* **Participant 3.** *At the beginning of the year, we also set up the team's action plan, in which we tried to structure it in a way that could ensure continuous technical guidance for professionals [...] What we realized, after the schools closed, is that the demand was very high in relation to the illness of education professionals. [...] So, we tried to start a proposal of listening rooms for these professionals.* **Participant 6.** *With the closing of the schools, we had many demands of dealing with the anguish of the professionals in the schools. Due to the pandemic, many professionals were losing loved ones and this change to remote teaching and all the necessary adaptation involved for the teachers, generated a lot of suffering for these groups, because many didn't even have the technological means to do the work remotely, which caused a lot of anguish and anxiety in these professionals. So, my main activities were based on the psychological listening to the anguish of these teachers and principals.* **Participant 7**. *Before, for example, we didn't have requests from schools for psychological assistance for teachers, and now this happens a lot. Many managers contact us asking us to provide these services to teachers and, in many cases, we realize that it is a personal demand.* **Participant 8.** *The trainings* [to school teams] *are our major work demands, also because it requires a high number of hours for each training, but the themes of these trainings have a lot to do with the current context of the pandemic [...] We chose to deal each week with a different feeling, which we will talk to any professional who wanted to participate in these virtual meetings. Then, we make available the day, the time, and the link for the person to participate remotely. It is a psychological listening group to deal with feelings with the school staff. We talk about feelings indeed, bringing reflective questions.* **Participant 10.**

When we began to understand that there was a possibility of suffering in the teams, we planned a project aimed at providing psychological listening for school teams [...] So, today, we work with admiration, other days we work with empathy, anger, and envy. Every week, in an online way, we work with a feeling, and this is offered to everyone in the school teams. And whoever wants to participate is welcome. And the staff has participated, it has been very positive, because we conceptualize, we ask reflective questions, so that the staff thinks and gets out of the place a little. It takes work, but it is work. **Participant 11.**

Each week we discuss a theme with teachers, monitors, coordinators, school managers (for those who sign up). Each week we work with a different theme. [And we have meetings that] *work like this: we welcome the school teams and then we bring a theme, of an emotion, of a feeling to discuss, always in the sense of self-care, not only washing hands and using masks, but also other types of self-care.* **Participant 12.**

I think a big training course we were able to do was about violence, and we were able to do several trainings, even with the teachers. (...) there were some more lives, which had many professionals present, because the Secretariat attends 19,000 students, so there are many professionals, consequently, about 1,800, 2,000 professionals. **Participant 13.**

Table 4. Participants' quotes, taken from the original transcripts of the interviews, concerning the theme of Target Audience of the Interventions in the School Context.

Discussion

The structural differences between the quality of services offered in public and private schools in Brazil did not start in the pandemic (Macedo, 2021). Historically, the working conditions of school psychologists are completely different, and the striking differences have already been emphasized in several studies (Mezzalira et al., 2019; Souza et al., 2011; Petroni, & Souza, 2017;). As expected, the data presented in this article revealed that the conditions of the private school system facilitated continuity of the work of psychologists in schools (through remote activities and interventions), which has also been presented in other studies (Fiaes et al., 2021; Souza, 2021).

In contrast, students in the public school system were practically unassisted in relation to psychological services and interventions in this period due to the scarcity of technological resources (Fiaes, 2021; Macedo, 2021), both in their schools and their families. Thus, the study revealed that, as in several other pedagogical and structural dimensions (Médice et al., 2020; Macedo, 2021), the pandemic accentuated the inequalities between the two educational realities, including in the services provided by school psychologists.

Before the pandemic, there was already discussion about the need for greater investments in terms of public educational policies in Brazil that ensure students' right to access psychological services in schools (Prioste, 2016). The lack of resources (Prioste, & Raiça, 2017; Silva et al., 2017), the lack of knowledge about the specificities of the work of psychologists in these contexts (Cavalcante, & Aquino, 2019), and the absence of specific training for the performance of psychologists in schools (Nunes et al., 2019) are recurrent themes in the national literature and indicate the need for intentional actions to ensure that these services are offered in an adequate manner, as well as being aligned to the needs of students and their families.

The results of this investigation showed that the pandemic and remote education have widened these problems and made it even more difficult for psychology professionals to work in public schools in Brazil. In this sense, it is of utmost importance that public investments are made to supply the demands for technological resources and access to the internet, both in schools, in the students' family context and, no doubt, by the school psychologists themselves, who in many cases made use of their own resources to make the continuity of their actions feasible. These investments are even more relevant as it has been hypothesized that students would experience an increased need for psychological services after returning to face-to-face activities (Schaffer et al., 2021; Karaman et al., 2021).

The increased social vulnerability conditions of families as a result of the pandemic is a theme that has been addressed in international (Guo et al., 2020; Hasking et al., 2021; Ritchie et al., 2021; Schaffer et al., 2021) and Brazilian national literature (Escobar, 2020; Pereira et al., 2020; Sambuichi et al., 2020; Sperandio, & Morais, 2021). In the same direction, this study revealed inequities between public and private school students in the resources, opportunities, and educational and psychological services they had access to during the pandemic period. The living conditions of the public-school students' families led psychologists working in these contexts to invest more effort in assessing and ensuring access to basic resources, such as food and printed school activities.

For Cavalcante and Aquino (2019), the lack of understanding about the nature of Brazilian school psychologists' own work, added to the economic and social difficulties of the families of public-school students, contributes to difficulty systematizing psychoeducational actions and interventions. In this sense, their practices end up becoming innocuous or getting confused with the functions of other professionals, such

as social workers and non-school psychologists (see also Machado, 2016). Some psychologists from public schools highlighted that their biggest concerns in the pandemic period were with the vulnerable condition of the families and that they were unable to perform psychological interventions aimed at promoting mental health or support students to adapt to the remote teaching model, which did not occur in the context of private schools.

In contrast, the interviews of the psychologists working in the private system clearly showed that a good portion of the interventions they conducted were focused on promoting the mental health of the students, especially those who were dealing with levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. The actions of these professionals were also extended to students' families and school teachers. These data warn about the inaccessibility of mental health promotion services to the most vulnerable population in the Brazilian context (Tonin, & Muniz-Barbosa, 2018), which, according to the literature, was perpetuated during the pandemic (Cavalcante et al., 2020; Lima et al., 2020).

Boechat (2017) states that psychology in Brazil, historically, has been consolidated as an elitist science that is at the service of a small portion of the population that holds most of the goods and resources produced. This 'selectivity' does not apply only to the area of school psychology (Bulhões, 2020). It is important to continue to advocate for an agenda that deconstructs this model that was established in practices based on segregation and inaccessibility to psychological interventions. This agenda is even more relevant when it is recognized that the pandemic will bring even more adverse effects in terms of the mental health of the most vulnerable populations, which includes public school students and their families.

Regarding intrafamily violence, the results indicated that psychologists who work in the public education network were more concerned about the worsening and increases

in rates during the pandemic. The national and international literature has pointed out that this is a phenomenon that occurred during the pandemic (Dulius et al., 2021; Humphreys et al., 2020; Lobo, 2020; Xue et al., 2020), especially because the potential victims had more time to live with possible aggressors, due to the social isolation imposed by the pandemic. However, this was not even mentioned by school psychologists from private institutions during the interviews, which could potentially be explained by the difficulty or lack of commitment of these institutions in dealing with the issue of intrafamily violence (Cascardo, & Gallo, 2018).

Martins and Romagnoli (2017) indicate that violence against children and adolescents occurs in families from all social strata. However, this topic may be more taboo and neglected in private school settings where families pay for their children's education (and could decide to enroll their child to another school).. It is important that the public authorities are aware of this and that there are more explicit and direct recommendations to school psychologists who work in private educational institutions about the cases of violence against children and adolescents that were intensified during the pandemic period, regardless of social class.

The adaptation of materials for students with disabilities was of paramount importance during the pandemic and in the remote teaching model (Supratiwi et al., 2021). Notably, this study revealed that professionals working in the private context were able to actively collaborate in adapting the pedagogical activities of these students, which undoubtedly indicates more consistent involvement of private school psychologists school inclusion initiatives. On the other hand, with the pandemic and the adversities experienced by professionals who work in public schools, the systematization of actions with this population was not provided, which indicates a setback in the model of inclusive education, due to the pandemic and its effects.

Brazil, before the pandemic of COVID-19, already experienced serious challenges in terms of the adaptation of teaching materials offered to students with disabilities (Bisol et al., 2018). The present study, in this sense, revealed a worsening of teaching conditions and precariousness of psychological care directed to students with disabilities in public schools, which may have repercussions on processes in exclusionary practices (Benitez, & Domeniconi, 2018; Neta et al., 2020). Although well-intentioned, public-school psychologists were not able to implement initiatives that ensured inclusion and access for this population.

It should be noted, however, that the challenges of school psychologists in working with students with disabilities did not commence with the pandemic (Benitez, & Domeniconi, 2018). For example, pre-pandemic there was a lack of undergraduate courses in psychology in Brazil that directly addressed issues about disabilities, inclusion and the role of school psychologists in working with this population (Bossi et al., 2018). Furthermore, there are few conferences and scientific events that help in the dissemination of research results and successful practices developed and tested in the national context (Cavalcante, & Aquino, 2019). Therefore, although more robust studies on the subject are needed, this research indicated that the difficulty of school psychologists in working with students with disabilities has become even more precarious, which resumes a separatist culture and segregation of this population (Neta et al., 2020).

The study revealed that public school psychologists notably conducted interventions more frequently with teachers. Based on the study by Nunes et al. (2019), we hypothesize that this factor may be associated with the fact that public school psychologists have difficulties and limitations in implementing interventions directly with students and their families, precisely because they are responsible for attending several schools and many students. With the high demand for work, which was already

high even before the pandemic (Pereira et al., 2017), the alternative found may have been the establishment of teacher training actions that, supposedly, could replicate the themes learned in these spaces and even recommend strategies to students to ensure well-being and mental health during the pandemic.

It is worth noting that both public and private school psychologists reported that teachers sought them out to report psychological distress, psychopathological symptoms, and experiences of mourning for having lost loved ones during the pandemic. According to Feitosa & Araujo (2018), psychologists working in the Brazilian educational system should also target specialized interventions with teachers and school staff, so that all segments benefit from the knowledge historically produced by the psychological sciences. However, it is important to highlight those low investments in school psychology (in private schools, but especially in public schools), work overload, and the absence of spaces for continuing education are some of the conditions that limit the implementation of quality work in these contexts.

There is no doubt that school psychology can play an important role in reducing the risks and negative outcomes produced by the pandemic in the school community. But the issues raised in this study show that it is still necessary to deal with long-standing structural inequities, allusive to very different psychological practices and interventions for the context of public and private schools, and new challenges, imposed by the pandemic and that may last for generations to come.

Conclusion

This study aimed to identify and analyze the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the work context of school psychologists in the public and private educational system in Brazil, emphasizing the specificities of each context. As expected, the results

showed that the impacts of the pandemic were more intense in the work context of psychologists who work in public schools. The lack of resources in both schools and students' families interrupted the actions that were being carried out and made it difficult for these professionals to contact the students. The emphasis of the work of psychologists during the pandemic was more directed to issues of social vulnerability than the teaching and learning processes or mental health of students in public schools. Students with disabilities seem even more disadvantaged, given that psychologists have not been able to promote interventions aimed at this audience. The alternative left to public school psychologists, according to the findings, was conduct training aimed at teachers, who hopefully could pay attention to students' mental health issues.

In summary, this research warns to the worsening of the working conditions of psychology professionals who work in public schools and suggests the pandemic accentuated the differences in the psychological services offered in public and private schools. Undoubtedly, there is a need for greater government investments to ensure psychological care for students who attend public schools. Although intercultural studies on the subject are necessary, it is hypothesized that the findings of this investigation, despite being alluding to the Brazilian reality, may be similar to other contexts and realities. It is suggested that similar studies be conducted in the future, so that the similarities and differences of the impact of the pandemic can be evaluated in the context of school psychologists worldwide.

Among the limitations of the study, the impossibility of generalizing the results is highlighted. The research, developed in the state of São Paulo, involved the participation of few professionals and certainly does not explain the impacts of the pandemic in the context of school psychologists who work in the Brazilian context as a whole, nor does it apply to the international reality. Even so, this research was relevant because studies of

this nature are scarce and it is known that the impacts of the pandemic will extend in the medium and long term to educational systems, which includes the work of school psychologists.

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'It was like the plane was on fire': Challenges Caused by the Pandemic for School Psychologists from Brazil and the U.S.

Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the impacts of the pandemic on the work of school psychologists in the American and Brazilian contexts. In addition, we analyzed the differences and similarities described by the professionals who worked in these two contexts. Twenty-eight school psychologists participated in the study, half   (n=14) who worked in Brazil and the other half (n=14) who worked in the United States. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and were analyzed through Thematic Analysis. The results identified more similarities between the two contexts, although important differences were also identified. The study revealed school psychologists' feelings of unpreparedness to adapt their routines to the remote teaching model, lack of adequate technical guidance, and increased levels of stress. In addition, the study revealed that school psychologists from both countries perceived that students had differentiated access to technological resources and the Internet. Differences that emerged between the two groups included the effects on communication with families and the time the school psychologists could dedicate to their own families and leisure activities during the pandemic, with the American psychologists bringing more positive reports in these dimensions.

Keywords: Pandemic; Psychology; School Psychology; Brazil; United States; Qualitative Study.

Introduction

In the year 2020, the world was surprised by the 3rd coronavirus outbreak of the 21st century, which quickly turned into a pandemic (Asrani et al., 2020). The first cases were detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province (China), in late 2019. As early as March 2020, 900,000 cases of COVID-19 had already been reported worldwide in over 200 countries (Sahu, & Kumar, 2020). According to the specialized literature (Ghinai et al., 2020; Sahu, & Kumar, 2020), the disease occurs due to a virus referred to as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome-Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV2) and was initially the result of zoonotic shedding. The virus began to spread very rapidly among humans through droplets of saliva or direct contact, vastly outpacing previous coronavirus outbreaks.

During the first two years of the pandemic, the United States and Brazil drew worldwide attention due to the high proliferation of the disease, making them, for a long time, two epicenters of disease spread. In the United States, from January 3, 2020 to April 14, 2022, there were, according to the WHO (World Health Organization, 2022), 79,716,960 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 979,321 deaths. According to Bowleg (2020), one of the main challenges facing the country regarding the treatment and decrease of cases of the disease is related to social inequalities, since the greatest impacts of the disease have been noticed in socially marginalized groups (racial/ethnic minorities, women, immigrants, and illegal workers, among others). This can be explained, among other things, because many of the frontline jobs considered essential during this period (such as retail workers and food deliverers, for example) are occupied by these groups, who besides being more exposed to contamination, had difficulties in accessing adequate treatment, especially due to the privatization of the health system in force in the country (Bowleg, 2020).

In the same direction, Brazil counted 30,183,929 confirmed cases of COVID-19 as of April 14, 2022, in addition to 661,493 deaths (World Health Organization, 2022). The pandemic of COVID-19 has severely impacted the Brazilian population due to the social vulnerability conditions of the population, marked by high unemployment rates and deep cuts in social policies (Werneck & Carvalho, 2020). In recent years, especially after this political context, there has been an intensification of social vulnerability conditions for a large part of the population. Consequently, this scenario caused the pandemic to spread in an uncontrolled way, leading the public health system to collapse in some regions (Werneck, & Carvalho, 2020).

Thus, it is noted that the most vulnerable populations suffered more profound consequences of the pandemic, not only with the effects of the disease itself, but also by the precariousness and worsening of living conditions (Figueiredo et al., 2021). In parallel, it should be noted that the government initiatives promoted at the beginning of the pandemic were led by controversial and denialist political leaders (Caponi, 2020; Mackenzie, 2020), which left populations even more insecure, as political disputes were heated and, consequently, weakened the measures proposed by the international scientific community to contain the virus.

It is already widely recorded how the pandemic compromised the physical and psychological health of different social groups (Esterwood, & Saeed, 2020). Studies have shown that indicators of depression, anxiety, feelings of hopelessness, worry and fear, inattention, and irritability have been increased in children and adolescents around the world (Chen et al, 2020; Saurabh, & Ranjan, 2020; Jiao et al, 2020; Figueiredo et al, 2021). Parents and caregivers of children and adolescents also experienced stressful conditions as they had to reorganize their lives to assist their children in school activities (Figueiredo et al., 2021), which resulted in more stressful conditions and an increased risk

of children and adolescents developing emotional and behavioral problems (Crescentini et al., 2020).

Children and adolescents had disruptions in their daily routines and had to quickly adapt to school activities remotely (Figueiredo et al., 2021). The schools, which began to operate remotely, played an important role, because in addition to seeking alternatives for the continuity of activities, they consolidated themselves as viable environments for psychological interventions with students and their families, aiming to promote and maintain the mental health of these groups (Burke, & Arslan, 2020). Thus, studies that investigate the implications of the pandemic on the work of school psychologists in the international context are relevant and necessary.

A study conducted by Schaffer et al. (2021) analyzed, from a nationwide investigation, how school psychologists worked during the pandemic in the United States. Six hundred and seventy-five school psychologists responded to a questionnaire about their work functions, changes due to the pandemic, challenges faced in the period, concerns, and plans about the face-to-face resumption of school activities. The results showed that the professionals perceived more worrying indicators in relation to the students' mental health, as well as difficulty in accessing the families due to the social distance. In addition, they had to make changes in their interventions and started to dedicate more attention to other professionals in the schools, who also presented psychological suffering during the pandemic period. The researchers also found that professionals were concerned about the resumption of face-to-face activities in schools because they perceived that students, families, and professionals would need more mental health support.

In the same direction, Reupert et al. (2021) conducted a cross-cultural investigation that sought to ascertain how school psychologists from different countries were conducting interventions focused on promoting student mental health and how schools changed due to the pandemic. The research also relied on the use of a questionnaire and recruited 938 participants, with 665 school psychologists from the United States, 48 from Canada, 140 from Germany, and 85 from Australia. The results showed that school psychologists in the four countries changed their ways of working and started to provide services to students and families remotely, although this occurred with students who had technological tools. As for the differences between the countries, the study revealed that in Germany and Australia there were more school psychologists who provided online services to help students' mental health. In addition, Germany provided more printed materials to assist students in their pedagogical activities.

Despite the importance of quantitative studies for the investigation of this phenomenon, there is still scarce research on the impacts of the pandemic on school psychology qualitatively. Furthermore, these studies focused on comparative analyses of developed countries, with no cross-cultural investigations from the reality of countries that have distinct economic and social conditions.

Thus, taking into consideration that i) the United States and Brazil were epicenters of the pandemic; ii) the most vulnerable populations, as pointed out in the literature, were impacted most drastically; iii) controversial and denialist political figures were in power during the most critical periods of the catastrophe; iv) the inexistence of qualitative cross-cultural studies with countries that experience distinct economic and social realities; it was considered relevant to conduct a cross-cultural study about the experiences of American and Brazilian school psychologists during the pandemic period.

It is important to point out that the work context of school psychologists in these countries is different. In the case of Brazilian psychologists, for example, the insertion of these professionals in the school context is very different, depending on whether the institution is public or private. Public schools are coordinated by Public Departments of Education, which are responsible for all schools in the municipality and carry out administration, supervision of resources, and deal with pedagogical issues (Barbosa et al., 2022). It is in these departments that psychologists attached to the public network work and, therefore, are responsible for attending all public schools in the municipality, facing structural problems due to lack of resources and work overload, as municipalities usually hire few psychologists to attend several schools and students (Nunes et al., 2019).

In contrast, private schools in Brazil are funded by middle- and upper-class families' own resources (Adrião, 2018), which implies greater availability of financial, pedagogical, and human resources in the institutions. In addition, psychologists hired by public schools generally work in only one school, increasing the possibilities of psychoeducational interventions and direct contact with students and their families. There is, therefore, an abysmal difference between the two contexts of action of these professionals, which are permeated by these social structures and the availability of financial resources (Ferrador et al., under review).

Furthermore, the insertion of psychologists working in public and private schools in Brazil is recent, since the first law that guarantees the participation of these professionals in the teams of Public Departments of Education is from 2019 (Brasil, 2019). Thus, these professionals, before this period, were rare in these contexts, since it was not a requirement imposed by law. Moreover, the aforementioned law does not apply to private schools, which operate independently from the operation of the municipality. This means that some private schools do not have psychology professionals, but it

becomes attractive for families to enroll their children in institutions that have this type of service.

The role and function of school psychologists in the U.S. also can vary greatly. Historically, the role of the school psychologist in the U.S. was tied to the "gatekeeper" function of assessing students for special education (Fagan & Wise, 2000). Although school psychologists in the U.S. still report spending considerable time on assessment and intervention planning for special education students, their roles and functions have also broadened to include mental health services, crisis prevention and response, school-wide programming, consultation, behavioral and academic interventions, family supports, and more (Walcott et al., 2016).

Currently school psychologist training in the U.S. is aligned with the National Association of School Psychologists' Practice Model (NASP, 2020), which encompasses 10 domains of practice: (1) data-based decision-making and accountability, (2) consultation and collaboration, (3) academic interventions and instructional supports, (4) mental and behavioral health services and interventions, (5) school-wide practices to promote learning, (6) services to promote safe and supportive schools, (7) family, school, and community collaboration, (8) equitable practices for diverse student populations, (9) research and evidence-based practice, and (10) legal, ethical, and professional practice. Although school psychologists in the U.S. are trained in these domains, there has historically been a discrepancy between the amount of time they would like to spend on such diverse activities and the amount of time they actually spend on them. For example, school psychologists report a desire to spend less time on assessment activities and more time on intervention and consultation activities (e.g., Hosp & Reschly, 2002). The degree to which school psychologists can provide varied and comprehensive services can be impacted by a variety of factors including the school psychologist to student ratio

(Castillo et al., 2016; McNamara et al., 2019). Although NASP recommends a ratio of 1 school psychologist to every 500 school-aged youth, the average national ratio is 1:1,211, 7 states/territories exceed a 1:5,000 ratio, and 2 states and 1 territory exceed a 1:10,000 ratio (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The disparities in access to school psychological services are concerning, but perhaps not surprising considering the broader conditions of inequitable funding and staffing endemic in U.S. educational systems (e.g., Baker, 2018; Cardichon et al., 2020; Spurrier et al., 2021).

From the theorical assumptions presented, this study aimed to analyze the impacts of the pandemic on the work of school psychologists in the American and Brazilian contexts. In addition, we tried to analyze the differences and similarities described by the professionals who worked in these two contexts.

Method

Participants and Institutions

A total of 28 school psychologists participated in the study, half of the participants (n=14) being professionals working in Brazil and the other half (n=14) in the United States. The participants were chosen by convenience and non-probabilistic sampling. The participants worked in diverse settings (which included both public and private institutions) and in a variety of community settings (rural, suburban, and urban). In addition, the school psychologists worked at different levels of education (early childhood education, elementary school, and high school). The sample was composed of male and female school psychologists, and the mean age varied considerably as there were professionals ranging from 27 to 66 years old. The participant selection criteria included psychologists who were already working in schools before the pandemic and who continued to work in the same environment at the time the pandemic started. The

recruitment of the participants was done by means of invitations sent by e-mail or by telephone contacts.

Instrumentation

The semi-structured interview technique was employed for allowing a detailed understanding of the meanings attributed by the participants to the researched phenomenon. Through this technique, participants have the opportunity to talk about their experiences, based on the main focus proposed by the researcher, but the interviewee can also issue free and spontaneous answers, revealing nuances and complex themes that were not foreseen in the original protocol (Brown, & Danaher, 2019).

The protocol used in conducting the interviews was developed by Perry (2022) and included semi-structured questions designed to gather information related to the role and function of school psychologists during the COVID-19 disruptions (e.g., *What tasks, activities, and/or assignments did / had you most often in your work period during the COVID-19 school closures?*), how they adjusted to these, and their perspectives regarding their roles during the pandemic and in their future practice (e.g., *What resources, if any, did you turn to for guidance regarding specific questions about your roles and/or best practices at this time of pandemic?*), upon the return of schools (e.g., *In your opinion, what were the opportunities to improve school psychological services that became apparent/emerged with the pandemic?*). The interview protocol also included technical guidance on how interviewers should conduct the interviews (e.g., *Explore participant responses as needed to encourage elaboration, e.g., "Can you give me an example of what you mean?" or "Please tell me more about this"*).

In the case of data collection in Brazil, the instrument was translated into Portuguese and some terms were replaced to make the questions more sensitive to the

reality of the participants, although no changes occurred in relation to the content of the questions.   After the interviews were conducted in Portuguese, they were translated into English for analysis between the teams from the two countries.

All interviews, both in the United States and Brazil, were conducted remotely through online meeting platforms: Google Meet, in the case of the Brazilian data collection, and Zoom, for the American data collection. The duration of the interviews varied among the participants from approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes each. All interviews were recorded, with the consent of the participants, and transcribed in full.

Procedures

Prior to conducting the interviews, the researchers obtained written informed consent from the participants. As previously mentioned, the interviewers used an interview protocol, developed by Perry (2022), although additional   questions were asked based upon   the interviewees' responses. The interviewers for the US team were graduate students and were asked to remove all identifiers from the participants before submitting the transcribed interviews to the research group. The study procedures for the US sample were approved by the Institutional Review Board at (anonymized for peer review) University.

Regarding the data collection conducted in Brazil, the research followed the ethical procedures in research with humans defined by the National Health Council (BNHC), in its Resolution 510/2016. A Research Ethics Committee, duly registered with the BNHC, approved the research project (Protocol number 39848120.5.0000.5504). Before data collection began, participants indicated that they understood that their

participation was voluntary and that their privacy and confidentiality would be preserved. All interviews conducted in Brazil were conducted in Portuguese by the first author of the article and transcribed in full by her as well. Subsequently, the first author, under the supervision of the third author, translated the interviews into English and then submitted the material collected to the research team from both countries. To ensure the ethical principles of the research, the Brazilian research team also removed the identifiers of all participants.

All interviews, both in the United States and Brazil, were conducted remotely through online meeting platforms: Google Meet, in the case of the Brazilian data collection, and Zoom, for the American data collection. The duration of the interviews varied among the participants from approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes each. All interviews were recorded, with the consent of the participants, and transcribed in full.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun, & Clarke, 2006) was used as a strategy for analyzing the interview data . It is a method to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and report themes found within a data set (Braun, & Clarke, 2006 *apud* Nowell et al., 2017). TA was chosen because it allows analyzing research participants' perspectives, highlighting similarities and differences between respondents' constructions of meaning about a phenomenon (Nowell et al., 2017).

To ensure methodological rigor of the data analysis, the guidelines of Nowell et al. (2017) and Liebenberg et al. (2020), were followed, which recommend that TA be performed in 6 steps: 1) familiarization with the material obtained in the data collection from the preliminary reading of all the interviews; 2) initial coding of the data,

independently among the researchers; 3) elaboration of themes from the codes formed; 4) review of the themes among the team of researchers, testing the appropriateness of the theme from the return to the raw material collected form; 5) nomination and definition of the themes among the research team, eliminating discrepancies by consensus in the presence of an external researcher, with vast knowledge in the study area; and 6) detailed description of the themes and discussion of the themes obtained from the theoretical basis.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, steps 1, 2, and 3 were conducted independently between the American and Brazilian researchers. From step 4 on, sporadic meetings were organized so that the teams could reach consensus about the relevance of the themes, their titles, and the probable theoretical explanations for these results.

Results

Based on the thematic analysis that was conducted, the results of the research revealed similarities in the reports of the professionals from both countries regarding the effects of the pandemic on the institutions where they worked and how they started working during the pandemic. However, as will also be revealed   in this section, differences were also identified that deserve attention.

The similarities were organized around five themes: i) personal feeling of lack of preparation to deal with the necessary adaptations for the continuity of the work and to face the challenges imposed by the pandemic; ii) increased stress experienced   by these professionals due to the new demands and work activities; iii) lack of guidance from organizations   and government entities; iv) increased focus on meeting basic needs; and v) unavailability of resources and unequal access to technology by families, which impacted learning and student care.

Regarding the differences identified in the two groups, the following stand out: i) improvement in the communication of American psychologists with students' families, which contrasted with the reports of Brazilian psychologists (who pointed out a greater distancing of families from the school and, consequently, from psychological care during the pandemic period); and ii) the quotes from the American psychologists also highlighted benefits and positive dimensions of working from home (more time with the family, possibility of professional development, reduced time commuting to schools), which did not occur with the Brazilian psychologists, who vehemently reported greater work overload during the pandemic, resulting in less free time for other professional and personal activities.

Summary	
Similarities	**Differences**
1. Lack of preparation 2. Increased stress 3. Insufficient guidance and resources for service delivery from state and local educational agencies 4. Increased focus on meeting basic needs 5. Unequal access to technology and Internet	1. Effects on communication with families 2. The home-office experience

Similarities

Lack of Technical and Professional Preparation

The participants from both groups (AP - American Psychologists - and BP - Brazilian Psychologists) reported that they felt difficulties in adapting to the new way of working that they had to face during the social isolation resulting from the pandemic. The Brazilian professionals, however, reported a difficulty regarding the adaptation of their

work to the technological tools. They also reported valuing face-to-face contact with students and their families in their daily tasks. Adapting to technologies and different tools seemed to the BP group an additional barrier, as they felt they had to adapt their whole routine to this new format. The professionals in the AP group also reported this difficulty in adapting to these tools but mentioned that they had more difficulty in understanding what would be the role, the functions, and the tasks that they should or should not adapt to the remote format, such as applying tests and systematized evaluations, for example.

Thus, the results of this theme showed that the feeling of lack of preparation was a characteristic that emerged throughout the speeches of the participants in general, both in the United States and Brazil, although there are specificities. This may be associated, as will be discussed in other themes, to several factors, such as the personal feeling of feeling uncomfortable performing activities that were always done face-to-face or the lack of support from the institution where they worked to provide resources to help them adapt their functions during the pandemic.

Lack of preparation

I did not feel prepared. It was a disaster because we were like, 'Uh, what are our roles and functions now?' Nobody knew. I could've probably extended and done more, but I was like, 'Ah! This is a mess. **Participant B**.

I think I was in the same boat as the majority of people in education. I felt very unprepared, just because it's nothing we've ever seen before. **Participant C**.

AP *We were not prepared whatsoever last spring. Even actually the start of this year, we knew we were going to be still online. And when we started, we started a couple weeks before the teachers, we still had no idea. The District didn't provide any kind of updates for how we're supposed to complete our evals. Are we allowed to do face to face testing yet? And we kind of had to figure that out within the first week we were back to get things going.* **Participant G.**

*I did not feel prepared to [deliver services remotely]. Um, I wonder if I had even been in a zoom meeting before that, like, I can't remember really. I doubt it...***Participant E.**

At first, I felt very lost. I often thought that my work was making no sense in remote teaching. I didn't really know how to carry out my work in this format, because I always valued walking around the school, observing the students so that my work was as coherent as possible. [...]but I really didn't know how to implement these services remotely. It was a little difficult, so it was more based on demands that came in, and so I worked from there. But several times I felt lost. **Participant 2.**

If am I prepared? No, I hate that. Outside of the pandemic context, is this remote education for children and adolescents possible? I don't think so... I think it would be a murder of education. That is the truth. **Participant 4.**

BP *I felt totally unprepared for this, because, besides the issue of the lack of preparation to adapt all the employees to use the digital platforms, even though the team was mostly young, they also had difficulties to use all this on a daily basis. My biggest difficulties were very much based on how to access this student. How am I going to access a student that I am not seeing? How am I going to access a student that I don't know how the caregivers are applying these activities?* **Participant 5.**

I guess I didn't feel prepared at all. I didn't really know how to handle it. As much as we already had many cases of care over the phone, most things we did in person, so it was difficult [...]. As much as there are texts from psychology that could help at this moment, everything was very new and, therefore, it was very difficult. **Participant 6.**

I didn't feel prepared because I didn't know how to use many of the tools, and I didn't feel comfortable being exposed for too long in online team meetings. **Participant 9.**

Increased Stress among School Psychologists During the Pandemic

The participants reported experiencing a greater remote workload due to the pandemic, which may be directly associated with increased stress levels among these professionals. Both groups reported having tight deadlines to fulfill their obligations. Moreover, multidisciplinary work also seemed, for both Brazilian and American psychologists, to be more challenging, since they depended on the support of professionals from other areas who were also overloaded.

The Brazilian psychologists also reported issues of deadlines and paperwork as challenging, but in addition, they reported that they needed to demonstrate that they were working normally during the pandemic. Especially among the Brazilian psychologists who worked in private schools, there was a sense of staff surveillance since they were working from home and not in the work environment. In addition, another specificity of the BP group were the reports of increased working hours and the need to be available after hours. According to some professionals in this group, there was an increase in the amount of care they needed to provide and, many times, they had to organize themselves to provide care to students and families outside of working hours.

Increased stress

I'm constantly chasing the deadlines and it has limited the other areas that I'm able to do. I do less counseling, less interventions. I'm just trying to maintain the timelines as best I can. So more of the roles of the school psych that I get life from, like the counseling and the interventions and the working with the teams and really kind of digging into what makes a student successful, you know, things like PBIS. Those things have kind of been more difficult to engage with because I'm just trying to get things done. **Participant N.**

AP

But when we first did it, it was like the plane was on fire. We're going down the runway, trying to put the wings on and then, oh wait, we lost the engine, get out. So, I think it was a lot more stressful, just because it was so sudden. **Participant K.**

I know it's been pretty miserable. I mean even like, yeah, I mean, it's, it's the school climates aren't great right now where I'm at anyway. Um, they're not like super negative, but they're not like there's just tension in the air with certain things. Like you don't, you don't dare, like, you don't really want to go ask questions about stuff because they don't want to stress somebody out. So it's been very, like just kind of do your best and survive, sink or swim kind of thing. **Participant B**.

It was a very heavy workload, but also because it was necessary to demonstrate that you were working. There was already an internal pressure, because we felt that we had to justify our work because we were not doing it face-to-face. But the pressure from the group, the team, and the managers was huge, and we ended up charging ourselves a lot for this. It was a very complicated period because of this need to show that we were working, to do many things to show this. We were constantly doing online trainings. I felt that I didn't have a rest time and I ended up working more hours than the amount of time that our work should be. **Participant 6.**

BP

For example, I have received messages in the late hours of the night from students who were in a situation that I couldn't ignore. I needed to talk to them, to know how they were doing. In a way I felt overwhelmed because it was hard to set the necessary limits. I think this was the biggest challenge I faced, because many times I worked in the early hours of the morning, at night, on weekends, and on holidays. **Participant 9.**

What bothered me the most was the need to be available 24 hours, because I didn't feel any difficulty regarding my profession (what I will orient, how I will orient). I don't feel I have difficulties in the question of orientation, but, as I told you, what bothered me the most was this availability that was very difficult, because there are mothers calling at 9 pm. **Participant 12.**

But what this period [of the pandemic] has taught me the most is: I will do what is within my reach, what depends on me, because the team of psychologists got very sick trying to embrace all the demands and trying to cope with them. We are trying to follow this path, so that we don't get more exhausted and get even more sick. **Participant 13.**

Insufficient guidance and resources for service delivery from state and local educational agencies

Both groups of psychologists reported that they did not receive adequate information from educational agencies and institutions to orient them to the implementation of remote work, especially at the beginning of the pandemic. Both the Brazilian and the American participants felt unassisted by the institutions, and entirely responsible for making adaptations and building protocols for the services. They felt helpless and, in a certain way, overlooked in relation to other professionals, who received training and greater investments.

It is worth mentioning a specificity brought by the participants of the BP group. An extra challenge they faced, besides the lack of guidance from the agencies, was the unavailability of resources from their own institutions (for example, internet access and computers) so that they could perform their functions. They reported the institution's lack of infrastructure as negligence and highlighted that they had to make use of their own resources to continue their work during the pandemic.

Insufficient guidance and resources for service delivery from state and local educational agencies

AP	*We didn't hear anything from ODE [Ohio Department of Education] for a while. From district level, it was, 'Try and do the best you can to maintain the timelines or at least keep us out of jeopardy, so keep us in compliance...I feel as though ODE has been particularly vague in their guidance and so- Do I know if it's legal? Do I know if it's what ODE would want me to do? I don't know....* **Participant N.** *The pandemic has of course put a giant speed bump in the road of getting everything completed in a way that's safe for everyone, but also in compliance with state and federal laws. Um, the state has not changed anything with the 60-day timelines. Everything is remaining the same, despite everything going on.* **Participant A.** *I think school psychologists in relation to PD are often forgotten. There's two of us in the district and it's really difficult to provide a training that really applies to our job that would also apply to others.* **Participant N.** *Definitely the...Department of Education, you know, some of their guidance. It's always kind of clear-as-mud kind of stuff, you know, they give you some details, but not others.* **Participant C**. *So they have, yes, they sent out videos or things that you could do and then they made like a guidance document manual and they went over all that with us. It was very- well, everything is very teacher-based and they tend to forget school psychologists. If there was a fire drill, nobody would know if I made it out. They always forget us.* **Participant I.**
BP	*There was no training for us. There was the training for the teachers [...], but there was no particularity training for psychological intervention.* **Participant 3.** *No training was offered to me. There was no training of any kind. The only thing that happened was the formatting of computers to be able to be used remotely and some meetings related to information about security protocol in relation to virus contamination. But, as I told you, this protocol was meant for the others in the team; for me, I can't follow this protocol today in my work, because my contact with the children is very direct, so I don't have any protocol related to protection against COVID-19.* **Participant 5.** *I believe that the most difficult aspect of this moment is related to this lack of structure, both in the school and in the Department of Education - in having good internet, computers, and the necessary materials. In the Department of Education, there is no good internet, nor a computer with a camera. Besides, when I need to schedule visits for specific cases I have to go in my private car, because there is only one car to make visits. So, we have a very big lack of structure in the department. We had a lot of exhaustion, because we didn't know how to proceed, even more because we didn't have all the infrastructure we needed, which we still don't have today.* **Participant 8.**

Increased focus on meeting basic needs

Both the participants in the AP group and the BP group reported that the institutions in which they worked had had to deal with problems related to the increase in students' social vulnerability indicators. They reported that the meals offered at schools were important to many families, and with the temporary closure, this type of support had to be adapted. The participants described some strategies that the institutions implemented to meet the basic needs of students and families during the pandemic, especially regarding access to food. Thus, the results indicated that both   American and Brazilian schools did not stop providing food, which was recognized and valued by the psychology professionals.

Increased focus on meeting basic needs

AP

And we organized food drives or we talked about families, you know, who are really struggling during covid and we found ways to get gift cards to them or drop off food. We ran some food pantries. So it basically came down to meeting our students' basic needs of, Do they have food right now? Do they have shelter? Are they safe? **Participant I.**

The other part of that is that we were still able to distribute food during this whole thing....So from middle of March until now, we started off as a pickup and then it was a delivery. So our buses were sort of like Uber eats at that point in time. So our buses would deliver food, going through neighborhoods and they'd have a neighborhood stop where parents could come and get food for their kids. **Participant H.**

When we shut down in the springtime and over the summer, our district was focused on, how do we provide meals to our students? Because we're assuming that a lot of them are not getting that. Breakfast and lunch was a big operation within our school buildings....I think what this pandemic has also shown is Maslow's hierarchy - are we even able to meet the basic needs? Maybe we need to scale things back a little bit and not worry so much about rigor and graduation requirements and state testing because we have more important things to try to focus on and work toward. **Participant J.**

So our, our nutrition program has done a really good job, like handing out sack lunches, breakfast, lunch, making it like, do like tapping into those federal, um, monies to get students food. **Participant B.**

BP

The city government changed the lunch [that was offered in schools before the pandemic] for basic food baskets and cleaning supplies. Not only in the school, but in the entire city, which was very important. There was a continuity, then, in the food field since children in social vulnerability often have as their main food the food offered at school. So, the municipality tried to supply this. Not completely, but it tried. **Participant 3.**

I think that mainly the basic needs, like food, have changed. Due to the pandemic, many families lost their source of income because of the many layoffs that happened during this period. The school is not a social assistance service, but, as the families are inserted in the school, they have sought this kind of support in this institution as well. The schools are making food kits available to the families, because many children needed that food that was served in school (the school lunch), so, with the pandemic, this food became deficient. **Participant 7.**

The school is a place of protection for the child. It is not only pedagogical, but also the question of food, of caring. So, all this vulnerability, these material losses, of people, of jobs, were changing. The community started to have other needs. **Participant 10.**

The needs have changed completely. There are many children that don't have enough to eat. There are schools that are doing this: the family comes, take the homework, and takes the food basket home. We are talking about hunger, about children who are starving. And we are delivering basic food baskets, the fourth or fifth time since the beginning of the pandemic. Besides school supplies, which were also provided to these children. So, there are children who have basic needs that we knew were in a difficult situation, but now they are in misery. The basic food basket that comes from the school feeds them and the entire household of sometimes 20 people. So of course, we know that the needs have changed, especially in the material aspect. **Participant 12.**

Unequal access to technology and internet

Participants in both groups reported that there was unequal access to the equipment and internet needed to follow the remote classes among the students. In the case of American students, although they were provided with technological equipment to follow the classes (such as computers and tablets), many did not have access to the internet, which led schools to adapt activities to printouts that had to be picked up at the institutions by families. This seemed even more evident among students living in rural areas.

In the case of Brazilian students, according to the psychologists' reports, inaccessibility to electronic equipment and internet was a generalized difficulty, affecting students from both urban and rural areas. It is worth noting, however, that this problem was described only by psychologists who worked in public schools. Thus, it was found that despite the specificities, both American and Brazilian psychologists recognized unequal access to educational opportunities, either by the type of community in which the students live (urban or rural centers) or by social class (public and private schools).

Unequal access to technology and internet

So, we were very fortunate that our school district is a one to one district. So, all of the students preschool through 12 have access to iPads…. The difficulty is that not everybody in the district has access to the internet at home. So how do you do that then. It was March, April, May was pretty much we're flying on the seat of our pants. No, just trying to figure out how to do this. And then, August, September it took a while to actually get connected and also get assistance with at AT&T and Verizon, but they helped us with hotspots that we can send hotspots home for families who didn't have access to internet. But that was a huge challenge. **Participant H.**

AP   *We were scrambling and we're in a rural area where there's not, you know- a lot of kids didn't have computer access or internet, so teachers were just making them packets. So, they'd come to school, pick up the packets and so on. So, you won't even really have an option to try to meet with kids or do anything virtually.* **Participant I.**

We, the district, gave out Chromebooks immediately. So, they filled in that gap, but internet access has been a thing. So they've, you know, tried to help families, sign up for like, spectrum was free for so long, but we found some families had back bills and they wouldn't take them. **Participant K.**

Another barrier that I would also like to mention is the technological one. Social vulnerability is not just the fact of not having anything to eat, nowhere to live; there is the issue of technology, because not everyone has a cell phone or even knows how to use one. There is also the barrier of poverty in the sense that mothers tell me that they don't want to participate in video calls because they live in a dirty, poor house and they don't want people to see this in the video. **Participant 3.**

The most vulnerable families, which are the ones that need the most specific support at this moment, we couldn't reach them, because most of them don't have internet at home, they don't have equipment and the school can't even contact these families. So, these cases that we were most concerned about are totally unattended. **Participant 7.**

BP   *There is no face-to-face class today. So, we have some parents, some families, who have difficulty accessing the Internet. So, the online classes are for those who choose to do so. It is mandatory for those who have this possibility, otherwise, it is just these printed activities. So, there are children who are not taking classes right now - those who have more difficulty accessing the internet.* **Participant 10.**

[…]we work with some parents, some families, who have difficulties accessing the Internet. So, the online classes are for those who opt for that. It is obligatory for those who have this possibility, otherwise, it's just these printed activities. So, there are children who are not taking classes right now - those who have more difficulty accessing the internet. **Participant 10.**

Everyone is affected, but perhaps those who don't have the resources are most affected. For example, there are mothers who don't have Internet at home, which makes it impossible for their children to follow the classes. **Participant 11.**

This loss is very serious, because approximately 30% of the children did not do any kind of activity in this period, because the parents could not get [the printed activities], or they didn't have a computer, they didn't have internet, whatever. These children worry us a lot. **Participant 12.**

Differences

Effects on communication with families

School psychologists working in the North American context reported that contact and communication with students' families and guardians improved after the pandemic, mainly because families no longer had to travel to school, there were fewer scheduling conflicts between meetings and work schedules, and they chose locations in their own homes to attend meetings. In addition, the participants in this group reported that e-mail communication satisfactorily replaced face-to-face communication and met the needs of some families.

In contrast, the psychologists in the Brazilian context reported that they experienced a greater interpersonal distance from the families at the time of the pandemic, making it more difficult for schools to maintain the link with parents and students. The Brazilian psychologists reported that many attempts to establish contact with families by phone or e-mail were unsuccessful, which resulted in the weakening of relationships and the impossibility of promoting interventions. In many cases, the families did not return the phone calls or emails sent by the professional, which caused estrangement and increased the need for Brazilian psychologists to sensitize parents about the importance of maintaining links with the school.

Effects on communication with families

AP	*I've actually had better participation from parents instead of them having to come to the school and I've had parents do an ETR [Evaluation Team Report] meeting and they're still in bed. They're on their phone, they showed up. So I'm getting more parents who are going to respond to me through email or they're willing to do a Google Meet with me. But if I'm like, "Oh, you need to come to the school," that can be an issue. So I've actually had better parent participation.* **Participant I.** *I would say that parent participation is better. We're meeting virtually because they can do it anywhere. And they don't [have to] necessarily take off a half-day of work to come in. They can just go to a quiet place for half an hour, so I think that we've had more parents attend meetings. But we've gone more virtual, more electronic in the ways that we're communicating with parents. I think we were making that change prior to the pandemic, but like a lot of things, that just accelerated it because that's what we had to do.* **Participant D.** *I like the zoom meetings more just because I think in some ways, that helps people here better attend, and I think it gives parents that are really stressed with driving time and work, it allows them to participate more readily and a little more focused without worrying about being late and happening to miss work for longer. So I think we get a lot more participation that way.* **Participant K.** *I would say that parent participation at meetings probably was better when we're meeting virtually, because they can do it anywhere. And they don't necessarily, you know, take off a half a day of work to come in, they can just go to a quiet place for, you know, half an hour, so I think that we've had more parents attend meetings.* **Participant D.**
BP	*Before the pandemic, I walked around the school, talked to the teachers, talked to the students. I used to pay more attention to the relationships in there. This was damaged in 2020, when we were completely in the virtual environment.* **Participant 2.** *The schools are not being able to approach and maintain the bond with these families in the same way as before.* **Participant 6.** *Most of the times when I communicate [by phone] with families, they are related to issues of finding them, because they usually have lost the bond with the school and are resistant families [to continue the remote teaching]. I hear a lot of "I won't do it; you won't make me do it". And I try to explain that these families must register their children in school in order not to lose the bond with the school. I try to explain that I understand the difficult situation they are going through, I try to explain that families don't have to do all the activities, but try to propose them to the child, so as not to lose this bond, this attachment. As these communications with the family members have been in this sense of pressure them, it has not been the best of relationships.* **Participant 6.** *[…] as much as we have adapted to technologies, face-to-face service cannot be replaced by video calls. The quality is not the same.* **Participant 7.** *We talk [with families] more in the sense of making them aware of the importance of school, of the activities, even if they are remote, and of the consequences of not doing these activities. In some cases, the family is more aware of the importance of these activities, but not in most cases. The family says that they can't do it and that they won't do it. We live in a reality, due to the parents' need to continue working, in which the children spend their days with their grandparents, and, in many cases, the*

grandparents are not able to access, are illiterate and, therefore, end up not being able to help their grandchildren to do these activities. In the case of young children, they need this support, and grandparents can't handle it. They are already doing too much in taking care of the grandchildren, because the parents are working. And we have no way to demand anything from them in this sense. **Participant 7.**

The great majority of families don't answer the calls and don't reply to messages, they don't give any feedback. **Participant 8.**

Every week, parents go to the school to pick up the activities and take the ones they have done. So, during these visits, the coordinators try to get closer to the families, ask how the activities are being done, give them some guidance, because sometimes there are families that still don't do them, or the children refuse to do them, they are extremely unmotivated. So, my contact with these families occurs only if there is a request from the school. **Participant 10.**

Our greatest access to the families was through the school [before the pandemic]. The school got lost in the middle of having to change its way of doing things, it had to get closer to the families, at the same time it became a very fragile relationship, so we psychologists were not able to reach the families so easily. **Participant 13.**

The home-office experience

Several school psychologists working in the North American context reported the experience of working at home (home-office) as more positive, in the sense that they were able to combine more free time to spend with their families, to dedicate to their own professional development, and by reducing the time spent commuting to schools. Thus, it was found that this group of professionals was able to identify positive characteristics of remote teaching, both in personal and professional matters.

The Brazilian school psychologists, however, generally reported the home-office experience as more negative. They reported a considerable decrease in their free time to dedicate to other activities, such as leisure and time with their families. In addition, they described feeling overwhelmed and perceived the need to be available for work all day, including weekends.

	The home-office experience
	I've had time to, think about things and research things that are interesting to me and I feel like, in some ways, I'm going back to the school [to] feel more capable and more [able] to do certain things that I wasn't doing before, because I've had really time to investigate and learn, just to think about, "How do you want to be a school psychologist? What role do you want to play more of? How can you do that?" **Participant E.**
AP	*I also have enjoyed working from home. I didn't think I would have thought that I'd be very distracted and not getting a lot of things done. But it's kind of nice.* **Participant H.**
	I am thankful that I got to have that extra time with my family and my little kids because they grow so fast. It's unfair just how quickly things change with them. So, to be able to see them grow and learn and play and develop over these months has really been something I'm sure that I'll always look back on fondly and be appreciative of. **Participant J.**
	I mean, personally. It was nice to stay home with my kids. Well, I say that it was nice to stay home. I have a one, a two-year-old, so it was nice, but exhausting to stay home. My kids make it almost impossible to work. I'm staying at home with my kids, but I at least had that time. **Participant I.**
	I felt that [the pandemic] really affected [the way I communicate with families], because we don't have free time anymore. Parents are in contact with us 24 hours a day now, because it's this online messaging format. So, it has affected them in the sense that they no longer have a set time for communication, as well as reporting more complaints. **Participant 1.**
	Mobile messaging has become the main form of communication, which makes us work all the time. Going back to school now, in the hybrid system, was very important to me for this reason: it is now easier to define working time. At home, I'm doing many things at the same time. During my break time, I would reply to messages from parents, so it changed the relationship between me and the parents, because we communicate very often now, especially parents of children with disabilities. **Participant 2.**
BP	*It was an initial year [of 2020] of a lot of overload and exhaustion for both of us and both me and my colleague started a process of getting sick and in the year of the pandemic this got a little bit worse.* **Participant 6.**
	In a way, I felt overwhelmed, because it was difficult to set the necessary limits. I think this was the biggest challenge I faced, because I often worked in the early morning, at night, on the weekends, I worked on holidays. So, for me it was hard to set those limits for myself as well, because I had a dilemma of how much I could or could not allow this kind of invasion. **Participant 9.**
	I can't just work. I have to have my physical activity, my favorite television series, my bedside book, my walk when possible. So, this alerted me to improve my work performance, because I was working 24 hours a day at the beginning of the pandemic. **Participant 11.**
	In home-office, [I had to be] available practically 24 hours a day. You have to be available. Now that I have returned face-to-face to work, I am working much less than when I was at home, because I used to be available 24 hours, Saturday, and Sunday.

> *Not anymore: we have fixed hours, my work is from Monday to Friday, with fixed hours.* **Participant 12.**

Discussion

As in several contexts of psychology work (Facci et al., 2020; Nickerson, & Sulkowski, 2021), American and Brazilian school psychologists reported difficulties in adapting their activities to the remote teaching modality. According to Liberati and colleagues (2021), this is associated with psychology's long tradition of conducting face-to-face care, including interventions that occur in educational settings. However, for Humer and Probst (2020), the pandemic has imposed on psychology and other fields the challenge of continuing remote care for the next generations. In this sense, it is essential that research be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of these models of care, so that psychology professionals working in school settings can have access to scientifically tested resources and programs, which can make them more confident about their own practice.

Furthermore, the results from the interviews with American and Brazilian psychologists indicated that the use of electronic equipment and digital platforms in psychological care will require changes in undergraduate and graduate courses, which should add in their curricula specific content for these modalities (Herold, & Chen, 2021). These changes refer to theoretical and methodological adaptations, but should also promote the mastery of skills for the operationalization of technological and digital tools. This last challenge, according to Silva et al. (2021), may be minor, given that undergraduate students are considered digital natives, i.e., they are completely immersed in virtual interactions.

In line with other research also conducted with psychologists and health professionals (Meroni et al., 2021; Pedroza, & Maia, 2021), this study revealed that work overload, added to the lack of clarity about the activities they should perform, increased, in the perception of school psychologists, stress levels, both in American and Brazilian participants. Several factors may be associated with this, but the literature has pointed to insecurity from contamination, irreparable losses of family and friends, future uncertainties, work overload, increased pressure in the work context, reduced deadlines for performing routine tasks, and the accumulation of domestic and work tasks, among others (Nicola et al., 2020; Zhang, 2021; Benzakour et al., 2022; Lee, & Neimeyer, 2022). Newnham et al. (2020) stated that the COVID-19 pandemic, being a catastrophe of global proportions, implied a worsening of the general mental health condition of the population, and school psychologists were not immune to these harms.

It would be important that studies be conducted that can detect symptomatic conditions in school psychologists who work in the United States, Brazil, and certainly in other realities. Song et al. (2020) highlighted the relevance of school psychologists in the post-pandemic period, because it is a group of professionals who have easier access to students and their families and can implement actions and programs to help them cope with the adversities caused by the pandemic. However, it is essential that the mental health of school psychologists is not compromised, which means that it is also important that efforts are directed to involve these professionals in programs focused on self-care and wellness promotion. Governmental and university initiatives may constitute viable and relevant alternatives for the assistance of school psychologists and their demands.

School psychologists in both Brazil and the United States explicitly reported a sense of helplessness and a lack of technical guidance from schools and educational agencies. The educational policies of both countries should have articulated themselves

more quickly and outlined specific protocols. But it is important to emphasize that this problem did not occur only in relation to psychologists. Long et al. (2021) and Zientarski et al. (2021) found that teachers and school principals also felt unassisted, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, and that they did not know how they should proceed to ensure the quality of the educational systems.

Complementarily, it has been noted that the actions and proposals implemented by political leaders have not met the educational needs of students. In Brazil, for example, there was a change of three Ministers of Education within 2 years, which led to policy discontinuities and uncertainty for professionals in the education system (Souza et al., 2021). Added to the lack of guidance and the controversial role of political figures, the psychologists interviewed, especially from the Brazilian context, reported that they did not receive resources to carry out their actions, meaning that educational systems that already had deep structural problems (Ferreira, 2020) were further damaged.

Students also did not have access to enough resources to keep up with remote teaching, which resulted in school psychologists in both countries finding it difficult to perform their services. This is also an issue that is associated with the ineffectiveness of the educational policies that were implemented. In the case of American students, according to the interviewees' reports, although they were provided with technological tools (such as computers, tablets, and ipads), many families did not have internet at home and could not participate in the classes or in the appointments of the school psychologists (which is similar to the findings of Morgan, 2020). In the case of Brazil, although the number of people who have acquired electronic equipment that enables internet access has increased in recent decades (Campello et al., 2018), there is still a significant contingent of families who have no resources at all to ensure access to remote learning. These issues have accentuated inequalities in access to education in both countries,

especially for children and adolescents attending rural and public schools, who, according to Schmidt et al. (2015) and Nunes et al. (2019), were already experiencing precarious pedagogical and technological conditions even before the pandemic.

A relevant fact that this research revealed were the initiatives described by psychologists from both countries to provide support to families in situations of social vulnerability, especially from the non-interruption of food distribution. The studies conducted by Gundersen, and Ziliak (2018) and Ferreira et al. (2019) already pointed out that many American and Brazilian students had access to food nutrients only when they were in schools. According to Gaynor and Wilson (2020) and Farias and Leite (2021), families that were already in a situation of social vulnerability even before the pandemic had their living conditions made even more difficult. The high unemployment rates of both countries implied the inaccessibility to proper food for many families, meaning that the initiatives of schools in adapting food distribution strategies was essential (Bicalho, & Lima, 2020; Masonbrink, & Hurley, 2020). However, it is important to note that school psychologists should be aware of the social demands of students, because there are already records in the literature that the pandemic can generate economic crises and recessions (Junior et al., 2021), even in countries considered developed.

The school psychologists who participated in the research demonstrated different perceptions about the bonds with students' families. By hypothesis, American families had more access to electronic equipment, as well as possess more skills and mastery of technological tools that enable virtual communication and interaction. However, the data collected in the present study does not fully explain these differences, which should be the subject of future research.

The research developed by Ferrador et al. (under review) found that there are families who did not participate in meetings with school psychologists because they lived

in humble households and would not want their homes to appear in the video calls. It would also be important to investigate the working conditions of these families. Salvagni et al. (2021) reported in their research that the number of informal workers increased considerably during the pandemic period in developing countries, which may have implied an increased workload for these families and, consequently, their inability to actively participate in the school life of their children.

Another fact that contrasts in the interviews between the American and Brazilian psychologists was in relation to positive characteristics that they identified in remote education during the pandemic. The reduction in travel time to schools and the opportunity to spend more time with families was reported in several interviews. In contrast, Brazilian psychologists, especially those working in private schools, did not identify positive aspects and mentioned that their workload had increased considerably and that they had less free time for activities with their families and for leisure. The complaints of psychology professionals about the increased workload have also been reported in the studies made by Inchausti et al. (2020) and Caurin et al. (2022).

To accurately understand the data that indicated the difference in evaluation between American and Brazilian psychologists would require complementary investigative procedures. It would be important, for example, to describe in detail the work routine before the pandemic, the self-efficacy beliefs and the motivation levels these professionals had. In other words, it is hypothesized that these differences (in the evaluation of the positive aspects of remote work in the pandemic) can be explained from the professionals' past experiences. Moreover, the support that families received from the American government, especially regarding electronic equipment, may have made the school psychologists' work more viable and prosperous.

Final Considerations

This study aimed to analyze the impacts of the pandemic on the work of school psychologists in the American and Brazilian contexts. Complementarily, we tried to analyze the differences and similarities described by the professionals themselves who worked in these two contexts. The results identified more similarities, although important differences were also identified.

It was common, in the interviews of American and Brazilian professionals, the feeling of being unprepared to adapt their routines to the remote teaching model, as well as the feeling that they did not receive adequate technical guidance to proceed with such changes. An increase in stress levels was also reported by the participants of both groups, which indicates the need for further investigations about the impacts of the pandemic on the mental health of these professionals. The study also revealed that school psychologists from both countries have the perception that students had different access to technological resources and the Internet, especially from variables such as location of schools (urban or rural schools) or social class (public or private schools). A positive data identified in the investigation was that the schools in both contexts adapted to maintain the distribution of food to the most vulnerable families.

What was most prominent in the interviews between the two groups was how they evaluated the maintenance of ties with students' families. The American psychologists understood that remote teaching improved interactions with some families, as they were able to organize themselves to attend meetings more frequently, did not have to spend time commuting to the schools, and had the opportunity to attend meetings that began to feel more comfortable. The Brazilian school psychologists, on the other hand, even mentioned that they had completely lost the bonds with some families and that they had a lot of difficulties to attend meetings virtually or by telephone.

The American psychologists also evaluated more positively some features of remote teaching, such as the fact that they can spend more time with their families and do not have to spend time commuting to the institution. This data did not appear in the interviews of the Brazilian school psychologists, who seemed to emphasize more negative and challenging aspects. They often reported the work overload and the impossibility of spending more time with the family or having leisure activities with the closing of schools due to the pandemic.

This study had the merit of being one of the first intercultural qualitative studies allusive to the experiences of school psychologists during the pandemic period. Studies of this size may help in the understanding of the specificities caused by this catastrophe, as well as indicate how the professionals in this field organized themselves to proceed with the adaptations that were necessary for the continuity of the work.

Among the limitations of the present investigation is the fact that the data cannot be generalized. This was a qualitative study and came from two very specific locations in the American and Brazilian contexts. Thus, the replication of this study in other contexts (including the reality of Brazil and the United States) may reveal data and information that were not even mentioned in this article. It is also recommended that future studies employ additional qualitative techniques, such as the reflexive interview (Pessoa et al., 2019) and systematized observations. The complementarity of different techniques may reveal key themes for in-depth understanding of the disruptions caused by the pandemic in the work of school psychologists, as well as illustrate how the resumption of regular activities has been.

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Protocolo para condução das entrevistas

RECOMENDAÇÕES GERAIS PARA CONDUÇÃO DAS ENTREVISTAS:

- Revise as perguntas antes do momento da entrevista para que você as conheça bem

- Lembre-se de gravar a entrevista e informar ao participante quando estiver prestes a começar a gravar

- Tente envolver os participantes em pequenas conversas que naturalmente levem às perguntas da entrevista

- Algumas perguntas estão apresentadas no roteiro de forma integrada, mas tente fazer uma pergunta de cada vez

- Faça perguntas na ordem que melhor flui no contexto da conversa (mas tente abordar todos os pontos o melhor possível!)

- Explore as respostas do participante conforme necessário para incentivar sua elaboração, por exemplo: "Você pode me dar um exemplo do que você quer dizer?" ou "Por favor, me fale mais sobre isso".

- O silêncio não faz mal! Espere alguns segundos após fazer uma pergunta, depois faça uma retomada do assunto, se necessário.

- O bem-estar do participante tem prioridade sobre os objetivos da pesquisa – se ele ou ela parecer angustiado ou desconfortável em resposta a certas perguntas, lembre-o (a) de que a entrevista pode ser interrompida a qualquer momento e as perguntas podem ser ignoradas

- Lembre-se: Entrevistas são conversas guiadas nas quais o participante deve estar falando a maior parte do tempo!

QUESTÕES DA ENTREVISTA

- Antes de começarmos, você pode me falar um pouco sobre seu ambiente de trabalho do ano passado? Por exemplo, eu estou interessada em saber em quantas

escolas você trabalhou, com turmas de quais séries escolares você trabalhou, se as escolas eram públicas ou privadas, e se as escolas eram urbanas, etc.

- Este é o mesmo tipo de ambiente em que você está trabalhando neste ano? (se não, peça-lhes que descrevam seu atual ambiente de trabalho).

- Quais tarefas, atividades e/ou deveres você fazia com mais frequência durante seu período de trabalho antes da pandemia?

- Quais tarefas, atividades e/ou atribuições você fez / tinha com mais frequência em seu período de trabalho durante o fechamento das escolas na COVID-19?

- Como sua escola (ou escolas) está atualmente funcionando e fornecendo instrução aos alunos (por exemplo, de forma remota, mista, presencial)?
  - Se atualmente estiver sendo presencial ou misto, pergunte: Que tarefas, atividades e/ou deveres você está fazendo com mais frequência em seu período de trabalho agora?

- Quando sua escola fez a transição para a instrução remota, até que ponto você se sentiu preparado para prestar serviços à distância?

- Como a pandemia afetou a forma como você conduz avaliações?
  - Você continuou a realizar testes, observações, entrevistas e/ou escalas de classificação? De que forma elas foram realizadas ou adaptadas?

- Que efeito a pandemia teve sobre os serviços de consultoria/aconselhamento que você presta, se é que teve algum?

- Até que ponto sua instituição ou município continuou a implementar intervenções durante toda a pandemia?

- Como os estudantes que frequentam sua(s) instituição(es) foram afetados pelas medidas adotadas por seu município frente à pandemia?
  - Quais segmentos da população estudantil foram mais afetados ou vulneráveis às mudanças que aconteceram em relação à pandemia?

- Como a pandemia afetou a maneira como você se comunica com os pais/cuidadores?

- Como você tem prestado serviços de aconselhamento durante toda a pandemia, se aplicável?
  - As necessidades de aconselhamento da população estudantil em sua (s) instituição (es) mudaram? Se sim, de que forma?

- Que treinamento, capacitação profissional ou apoio profissional sua escola ou município tem fornecido em relação à pandemia?
- A quais recursos, se houve, você recorreu para orientação a respeito de questões específicas sobre suas funções e/ou melhores práticas nesse momento de pandemia?
- Na sua opinião, quais têm sido as maiores barreiras ou desafios relacionados à prestação de serviços psicológicos escolares eficazes no meio da pandemia?
- Na sua opinião, quais foram as oportunidades para melhorar os serviços psicológicos escolares que se tornaram aparentes com pandemia?
- Que mudanças duradouras no papel e na função dos psicólogos escolares você prevê como resultado da pandemia da COVID-19, se houver alguma?
- Quais têm sido os aspectos mais agradáveis de seu papel como psicólogo (a) escolar durante a pandemia?
    - Eles mudaram em relação ao seu papel antes da pandemia?